Saturday, November 7, 2015

[Pittsfield, Mass.] – Award-winning journalist Stephen Kurkjian will discuss his new book, Master Thieves: The Boston Gangsters Who Pulled Off the World’s Greatest Art Heist, on Saturday, November 7, at 10:30 a.m. at the Berkshire Museum. The talk and book signing are included with regular Museum admission.

The 1990 theft of 13 artworks from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston is a case defined by superlatives: the largest art theft in history, carrying the world’s largest reward offer, longer on the FBI’s list of biggest unsolved art crimes than any other save one. Two men disguised as Boston Police officers tricked their way into the Gardner Museum after midnight, tied up the two night watchmen and made off with an estimated $500 million worth of artwork, including three works by Rembrandt and a Vermeer masterpiece.

Now 25 years after the theft, Stephen Kurkjian, who was the principal reporter on the case for The Boston Globe for years, has written a gripping account of the still-unsolved heist of a quarter century ago. In Master Thieves, Kurkjian reveals how the two criminal gangs battling for control of the Boston underworld knew of the museum's poor security and that one had a motive to pull off the theft — to fashion an exchange that would result in the release of its leader from federal prison.
Kurkjian also will talk about a famous art heist with a local connection, which he wrote about in 2000 and circa 2007-2008: seven paintings, including a Cezanne still life, were stolen from a Berkshires home in 1978 in one of the biggest house robberies in Massachusetts history. Twenty-one years later the Cezanne was recovered and auctioned for $29 million.

About Stephen Kurkjian
A Boston native, Stephen A. Kurkjian spent nearly 40 years as an editor and reporter for The Boston Globe before retiring in 2007. During his career, he shared in three Pulitzer Prizes and won more than 20 regional and other national awards.

Kurkjian was a founding member of The Globe’s investigative Spotlight Team, and its editor for 1979-1986. In 1986, he was named chief of The Globe's Washington Bureau and for six years oversaw the work of the paper's 10 reporters in Washington. In addition, while at the bureau he covered the Supreme Court, the Justice Department and the Bush White House during the first war in Iraq.

Returning to Boston in the early 1990s, he completed numerous investigative projects from The Globe newsroom including the clergy abuse scandal inside the Boston Archdiocese and the devastating fire at a Rhode Island nightclub that took the lives of 100 people. His 2005 article on the theft of 13 pieces of artwork from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is regarded as the most complete account of the still-unsolved crime. This year his book, Master Thieves: The Boston Gangsters Who Pulled off The World's Greatest Art Theft, was published by PublicAffairs. The book has drawn praise from reviewers from The New York Times, Boston Globe and Kirkus Review.

Educated in the Boston public schools, Kurkjian is a graduate of Boston University and Suffolk University Law School. He is a non-practicing member of the Massachusetts Bar.

About the Berkshire Museum
Located in downtown Pittsfield, Massachusetts, at 39 South St., the Berkshire Museum, a Smithsonian Affiliate, is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and
noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is $13 adult, $6 child; Museum members and children age 3 and under enjoy free admission. For more information, visit www.berkshiremuseum.org or call 413.443.7171.

In association with the Smithsonian since 2013, Berkshire Museum is part of a select group of museums, cultural, educational, and arts organizations that share the Smithsonian's resources with the nation.

Established by Zenas Crane in 1903, Berkshire Museum integrates art, history, and natural science in a wide range of programs and exhibitions that inspire educational connections between the disciplines. **American West** is on view through January 3; **Powered Narratives: Photographer John Stanmeyer** is on view through November 8. **Spark!Lab**, the hands-on creative laboratory developed at the Smithsonian Institution by the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation at the National Museum of American History (NMAH), is on view through 2016. Little Cinema is open year-round. Feigenbaum Hall of Innovation, Worlds in Miniature, Aquarium, and other exhibits are ongoing.

# # #